

GDC Session #9

Coping With Guilt and Shame

Objectives of Session

1. Define guilt and shame.
2. Identify how cocaine addiction contributes to feelings of guilt and shame.
3. Introduce strategies for healing from feelings of guilt and shame.

Methods/Points for Group Discussion

1. Use a discussion format to review the clients' answers to the handouts and the educational material for this session. Write the major points on a chalkboard or flip chart, if desired.
2. Ask group members to share their own experiences related to this material, as it is reviewed.
3. **Guilt** refers to feeling bad about one's behaviors, including things one did or failed to do. Examples of behaviors one may feel guilty about include the following:
 - Said or did things to hurt family or friends.
 - Acted immorally.
 - Committed crimes.
 - Lied to and cheated others.
 - Conned family members or used family money to buy drugs.
 - Lost money and went deep into debt.
 - Didn't act responsibly as a parent or spouse.
 - Failed to take care of personal responsibilities.
4. **Shame** is a painful belief in one's basic defectiveness as a human being. Shame can involve feelings of humiliation, mortification, dishonor, or disgrace.
5. Addiction invariably produces feelings of guilt and shame that damage the addict's self-esteem. Addicts usually experience feelings of guilt and shame over their behavior while they are addicted, and they may feel ashamed for becoming addicted to drugs. Some addicts may not feel worthy or deserving of recovery.

6. Feelings of guilt and shame can give the cocaine-addicted person permission to continue to use drugs. Addicts may dwell on negative feelings they have about themselves, or they may try to deny or escape from these feelings by using chemicals.
7. People lose energy when they give themselves guilt and shame-producing messages and may use drugs to give themselves a false sense of euphoria to change their mood.
8. Discuss strategies for healing guilt and shame such as:
 - Recognize your guilt and shame.
 - Give yourself time to feel better about yourself.
 - Accept your limitations.
 - Talk about your feelings of guilt and shame.
 - Use a 12-step program.
 - Make amends (steps 8 and 9).
 - Seek forgiveness.
 - Don't use cocaine or any other drug, including alcohol.

GDC Session #9 Handouts

1. "Coping with Guilt and Shame." Adapted from *Group Drug Counseling Participant Recovery Workbook*. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, Inc., pp. 20-21.
2. "Strategies for Coping With Guilt and Shame."

GDC Session #9, Sample Handout #1

Coping With Guilt and Shame

Feelings of guilt and shame are common among individuals addicted to cocaine. **Guilt** refers to feeling bad about your behavior. You can feel guilty about things that you did as well as things that you failed to do. For example, you may feel guilty for using family income for drugs; hurting, lying, or conning family or friends; breaking laws to get money to pay for drugs; or being violent with loved ones. You also may feel guilty for not fulfilling your obligations or your responsibilities to your family. This may include not spending time or taking much interest in the lives of your parents, spouse, or children.

Shame refers to feeling bad about yourself. You feel weak, defective, or like a failure. When you feel ashamed, you feel that something is wrong with you, that you are less than other people.

As is the case with many of the other recovery tasks, it will take you time and effort to work through guilt and shame. Answering the following questions will help you clarify where you stand in relation to guilt and shame and help you start to create an action plan.

1. Below, list behaviors or actions (things you did) related to your cocaine or other drug use that you feel guilty about.

I forgot my son's birthday several times.

I lied to my boss many times when I missed work or was late in doing my assignments.

I lied to my mother to get money for drugs.

I even stole from her, I was so desperate for money.

2. Below, list things you failed to do because of your cocaine or other drug use that you feel guilty about.

I missed my son's junior high school graduation.

I didn't spend time with my wife and ignored my kids because I was too busy getting high.

I seldom visited my parents unless I needed money from them.

3. List ways in which your use of cocaine or other drugs affected your sense of shame or how you feel about yourself.

I thought I was a rotten person because I'd do anything to get my drugs.

I lost my values and morals.

I sold family belongings to get money for drugs.

I thought I didn't deserve to be helped by anyone.

4. List positive behaviors that will help you get over your feelings of shame and guilt.

I have to become a responsible father and husband and take an interest in my family.

I have to make amends to them and make sure I spend time with my wife, son, and daughters.

I have to visit my parents and help them out.

Most importantly, I have to stay off cocaine and other substances.

GDC Session #9, Sample Handout #2

Strategies for Coping With Guilt and Shame

1. Recognize your guilt and shame.

Be honest with yourself about what you did or failed to do as a result of your cocaine addiction or other substance use problem.

2. Give yourself time to feel better.

Be realistic and accept the reality that it may take a good deal of time to feel less guilty and ashamed. Change may come initially in small steps, such as feeling a little less guilty now than in the past. Remember, feeling better about yourself will be connected to staying off drugs and making positive changes in yourself and your lifestyle.

3. Accept your limitations.

Admit and accept your flaws and limitations. Don't blame yourself for having an addictive disease. However, take responsibility for making positive changes by becoming sober and clean, staying sober and clean, and dealing directly with problems caused by your use of cocaine or other drugs.

4. Talk about your feelings of guilt and shame.

Talk with others about your feelings of guilt and shame. Share your true feelings and admit honestly the things you did that directly or indirectly hurt others as a result of your cocaine or other drug use. The details of your actions or inactions are best shared with someone who understands cocaine addiction (a therapist or counselor, clergy member, sponsor, or other men and women in recovery).

5. Use a 12-step program.

Use the 12 Steps of AA, NA, and CA. Many of the steps directly and indirectly help an individual deal with guilt and shame. For example, Step 5 states: "admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

6. Make amends.

Make amends to others who were hurt by your drug use. This puts you in a better position to receive forgiveness from others. Steps 8 and 9 of the 12-Step programs of AA, NA, or CA can help guide you through this process. A sponsor can help you figure out when and how to make amends.

7. Seek forgiveness.

You can ask for forgiveness directly from others who were hurt by your cocaine addiction. Keep in mind that the risk you take is that some people may not want to forgive you for what you've done to hurt them. Also, asking forgiveness must be done with sincerity and humility. It will be meaningless unless you work hard at your recovery and show positive changes in your behaviors. You also can ask forgiveness from God or a higher power.

8. Don't use cocaine or any other drug, including alcohol.

You have to continue staying clean from drugs if you expect to feel better about yourself. Staying clean provides you with a better chance to make something of yourself and feel good about who you are. If you continue to get high, you are likely to continue hurting others as well as yourself. As a result, your guilt and shame may feel even worse than they do now.